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no.44

United States Department of the Interior
Fish and Wildlife Service

Fishery Leaflet 44

Chicago 54, Ill. * December 1943

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HOW TO MAKE BLOATERS

From the Art of Fish Curing, by "Viking," (R. J. Duthrie)
The Rosemount Press, Aberdeen, 1911, pp. 45-46

The bloater trade is more an English than a Scotch industry. Scotch curers, and also English firms doing a smoking business in Scotland, confine their attention principally to the kippering business. The making of bloaters is, however, a simpler and less elaborate process than the making of kippers.

Salting.--If fresh herrings have to be dealt with, the usual method of curing is to rouse them well with dry salt upon a brick or pavement floor, turning them over with a wooden shovel during the process of salting, and leaving them overnight in the salt. In the morning, they are washed through light pickle, and hung on spits or tenters.

Hanging.--Spits, it may be as well to say, are rounded wooden rods, 4 feet long, about the thickness of a man's finger, and sharpened at one end. As the wood is apt to get blunted, tin cones with sharp points are often fixed upon the points of the spits during the process of spitting. Occasionally, iron rods are used for spits, and these are much thinner than the wooden ones. To spit herrings, either for bloaters or reds, enter the sharp end of the spit below the gill cover of the fish, and push it out through the mouth. Hang the spits in the kiln--an ordinary kipper kiln--in the same way as the tenters of kippers.

Pickling.--Curers who make preparations for doing a large business in bloaters usually have vats or tanks, large enough to contain great quantities of fish, constructed on their premises--sometimes below the floors of their stores. When herrings are plentiful and cheap, these vats are filled with roused herrings (usually sea-salted), which are then floated in pickle, and afterwards drawn out and smoked at the curer's convenience. A regular supply is thus assured for a considerable time, even though prices of fresh herrings should rise or the fishing come to an end.

Smoking.--Bloaters are smoked in much the same way as kippers, but a fire of hardwood billets is usually preferred to chips and sawdust. The soft fuel gives rather more color than is desirable, as bloaters should be dried rather than colored in the smoke. Eight hours light smoking will generally make the fish ready for market.

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Packing.--Bloaters are packed across the box with heads all to one side till the tier is complete; then two or four herring with their heads to opposite ends of the box are laid lengthwise across, the tails of the fish in the tier. The second tier is packed across the box like the first, but with the heads of the fish to the opposite side of the box, that is, over the tails of the fish in the lower tier. Herring are laid over the tails of the fish again, and so on till the box is full.

A small kiln.--The fishmonger who may be left with a balance of fresh herring unsold--or anyone who wishes to prepare a few dozen bloaters--may, instead of dry-salting, immerse the herring in strong clean pickle, and leave them in it overnight. In the morning, the fish will be ready for hanging. It should be distinctly understood that the smoking of fish does not depend upon the size of the kiln. All round the Scotch coast, for instance, there may be seen small smokehouses, in which the fishermen's wives smoke haddock to perfection. They are generally rough wooden buildings, often put together by the fishermen themselves, perhaps 4 feet square and 6 feet or 7 feet high, with bars at opposite sides and suitable intervals for supporting the spits or tenters. Dwarf walls of stones or clay inside may protect the wooden walls from the fire. Even a large cask, with both ends out and a few holes bored in each quarter for ventilation, may be converted into a kiln fit to smoke a few dozen bloaters. In this case, it is necessary to put the fire in an iron vessel, and to spread a sack or other heavy covering over the cask during the process of smoking.

NOTE.--Fishery Leaflet 44 supersedes Memorandum F.I. 98, and S. 98, issued by the former Bureau of Fisheries.

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